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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003586

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PHUM IZ

SUBJECT: MITHAL ALUSI REMAINS DEFIANT DESPITE THREATS

Classified By: A/DCM Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: As of November 9, 2008, Iraqi Parliamentarian Mithal Alusi remained vigilant in the face of threats against him and his party, and said ISCI operatives have approached his personal security detail. Alusi retains approximately 70 security guards, and reported threats and intimidation against his party in Maysan, Qadisiya, and Fallujah. A civil case against Alusi is pending before the Supreme Court, and Alusi reported that the Prime Minister's Office is pushing the criminal case. Finally, Alusi noted that he would be traveling imminently to Irbil, Amman, London and Washington, and is seeking meetings with Vice President-elect Joseph Biden, Representative Christopher Shays, and other "American friends." Alusi continues to make controversial comments to the media as part of a strategy to keep himself in the public eye. END SUMMARY.

Security:

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¶2. (SBU) Poloff met Alusi November 9, the latest in a series of weekly meetings. Three armed men were guarding his front gate, in addition to two other men with no visible weapons. Alusi confirmed that he still has the full complement (30 persons) of his parliament-funded personal security detail (PSD). He confirmed that 33-34 persons from his Ministry of Defense (MOD) PSD remain, whom Alusi pays from personal funds. In total, approximately 70 guards protect Alusi's home and party offices in Baghdad, with 10-14 men guarding his house in the International Zone.

¶3. (C) Poloff noted that the Embassy's Rule of Law office (ROL), since September, has pressed the MOI to provide additional security in the form of an Iraqi Police detail. Alusi expressed doubt that these efforts would succeed, stating that the Minister of Interior, Jawad al Bulani was under pressure from PM Maliki not to assist Alusi.

Threats/Intimidation

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¶4. (C) As in previous meetings, Alusi said that his party members in Maysan, Fallujah and Qadisiya continue to receive threats and intimidation, and provided documents to that effect. As a result of this intimidation, Alusi said he may not be able to conduct his political campaign in the South. (NOTE: The Embassy has been following up on the information Alusi provided, but has been unable to confirm the reports as of the most recent meeting. End Note.)

¶5. (SBU) Alusi claimed that the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) was behind recent threats. Alusi said an ISCI-member approached one of his key bodyguards, Nabil Imad al Dulayme, and offered him a position with the MOI. Dulayme rebuffed this approach, but Alusi said he believes that ISCI may be talking to other bodyguards. (NOTE: MNF-I's J-2 is expediting badges for key members of Alusi's security detail and staff to ensure their unencumbered movement around the Green Zone. J-2 is also investigating

the alleged threat activities. END NOTE.)

Legal Cases

¶6. (C) Alusi remains apprehensive about his civil case challenging the Parliament's vote to lift his immunity. He has expressed concern both about Chief Justice Medhat's ability to resist pressure from Maliki, and the timeline for issuing the decision. In this meeting, he seemed more confident of Medhat's independence, but was concerned over the case's timeline. Alusi worried that the court would drag out the process too long and inhibit his campaign options. On the other hand, Alusi mused that a decision either way could be used to promote his political message, although he would prefer a decision in his favor. Poloff noted that the Rule of Law office has been meeting regularly with Medhat to press Alusi's case, and that Medhat had confirmed to ROL that the Court would issue a decision by Nov 30.

¶7. (C) The criminal case against Alusi, based on his travel to Israel, awaits a decision on the civil case regarding immunity. Alusi provided Poloff with documents that he said he had obtained from a source in the criminal investigative court indicating that the Prime Minister's office was pressing to move the criminal case forward. Alusi also provided documents indicating that Parliament was seeking to "freeze" the civil case so that the criminal case could proceed. (Note: ROL will raise this issue and investigate the claims with appropriate members of the Iraqi courts. End Note.)

BAGHDAD 00003586 002 OF 002

Travel

¶8. (C) Alusi noted that he was traveling the same day to Irbil, Amman, London, and Washington. He said he was seeking meetings with Vice President-elect Joseph Biden, Rep. Christopher Shays, and "other American friends" (NFI). He said would take at least one security guard with him.

Publicity

¶9. (C) In recent weeks, Alusi has made a number of controversial comments in the Iraqi media, claiming that some Iraqi leaders have accepted bribes from Iran and are working for Iran, and specifically naming ISCI leader Abdel Aziz al-Hakim in one instance. He said he was pleased with the response, which apparently led a private Iraqi citizen in Sadr City to file a criminal charge against Mithal for travel to Israel. Despite the danger that such comments might invite, Alusi said that the Iraqi people need to know the facts about their leaders, and added that it was important to have his name in the public eye, commenting: "when you have lots of time, you talk to the media."

Comment:

¶10. (C) Alusi is essentially house-bound, even in the Green Zone, which makes it difficult for him to conduct his political campaign. For this reason, the media has become an important means by which he can get his name and message out. Alusi is growing impatient, and is afraid he is losing his visibility. Some of his party's gains have resulted from media attention on him, with several people telling him privately that they agreed with his right to travel to Israel. Alusi believes that he can channel some of this private sentiment into political support. His campaign strategy has been based on appealing to secular nationalist feelings among many Iraqis. His inflammatory comments about Iran and its influence in Iraq also tap into

many Iraqis' sense of nationalism. While concerned about his physical safety and his supporters, it is unlikely that Alusi will back off these comments to lower his threat profile.

CROCKER